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# Inside Information

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of Agriculture

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## PANEL WEIGHS VALUE OF GOV'T INFORMATION

A reporter sharply critical of "Uncle Sam's Ever Expanding PR Machine" will be a panelist May 21 at a Washington, D.C., workshop aiming to help Government information shops operate with smaller staffs.

The panelist is Tom Palmer, a Washington-based freelance writer, whose recent Wall Street Journal article characterized government public information as a "gigantic and slumbering beast that eats tax dollars." It was that article's headline which tagged such information the "Ever Expanding PR Machine."

The occasion is the opening day of a two-day information workshop at the 4-H Center which is co-sponsored by the Washington, D.C., and Northeast Regions of Agricultural Communicators in Education (ACE) and USDA's Office of Information.

Sharing the panel with Palmer will be John McClung, director of the Office of Information, and Jaia Barrett, of the Association of Research Libraries.

Keynote speaker of the workshop will be Helen Thomas, of United Press International, dean of White House news correspondents.

Thomas is scheduled to speak at 9:25 a.m. Tuesday, May 21. The panel discussion gets underway at 10:30 a.m.

A \$35 registration fee covers workshop materials, Tuesday lunch and social hour, and coffee breaks.

For further information, contact D.C. ACE President Russ Forte on (202) 447-5881.

The workshop, incidentally, will follow the Monday, May 20 meeting of the Northeastern Region of ACE in the same location.



## STEPHEN HESS TO ADDRESS PAC MEETING

Stephen Hess, who concluded in his recently published book, "The Government/Press Connection," that government press offices are "an entitlement that flows from the nature of a free society and the relationship of the state to the citizen," will be the guest speaker Tuesday May 14 at the biweekly meeting of USDA's Public Affairs Council (PAC) meeting.

Hess is a senior fellow in the Governmental Studies Program at Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C.

His book is based on a year of observing press operations at the White House, the Department of State, the Department of Defense, the Department of Transportation, and the Food and Drug Administration.

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AGRICULTURE FACT BOOK AVAILABLE

"Last year consumers spent \$312 billion for U.S. farm-produced foods. About \$228 billion of that was to get the food from the farm to your table. The food was assembled, inspected, graded, stored, processed, packaged, wholesaled, and retailed -- more than 400 million tons of it. To reach you this food traveled across 173,800 miles of railroads, 3.4 million miles of highways, and 26,000 miles of improved waterways."

"Farmers' 1983 purchases included \$9.8 billion for farm tractors and other motor vehicles, machinery, and equipment. About 150,000 employees are required to produce this farm equipment."

Facts like these are crammed into the "1984 Fact Book of U.S. Agriculture," being promoted for sale now by the Government Printing Office.

You can get your copy by mailing a check for \$4 to the Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D.C. 20402

Each year the book--about the size of a paperback--is updated by the Special Programs Division of USDA's Office of Information from material supplied by several agencies within USDA.

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PSA URGES CONSERVATION TILLAGE

A 60-second public service announcement for television made up of color slides--the first to be produced by the Photography Division of USDA's Office of Information--was sent to eight Midwest states in April, hopefully just at soil-preparation time.

The sound track also was converted into a radio PSA and sent to 700 radio stations.

The PSAs were created by Russ Forte, then with the Photography Division and now with the Special Programs Division of OI.

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SITE PICKED FOR NAGC CONFERENCE NOV. 4-6

Loew's L'Enfant Plaza Hotel in southwest Washington, D.C., has been selected as the site of the 1985 conference of the National Association of Government Communicators.

Theme of the Nov. 4-6 conference is "Communicating the Right Message."





## SOIL CONSERVATION IS GOLDEN

This country's 50th anniversary celebration of the soil and water conservation movement peaked Saturday, April 27 with a monumental banquet in Washington, D.C.

For the information staff of USDA's Soil Conservation Service, though, the banquet was just the climax of nearly four years of planning, preparation and execution. Not that the celebration is over yet!

Actually, you can see why the celebration might get spread out a little.

A soil erosion service was established for awhile in the Interior Department in 1933. But two years later, the Soil Conservation Service was created.

Then, two years after that, the White House sent all the governors a "Standard Soil Conservation Districts Law" and urged the states to adopt it. The model act provided for land owners and operators to organize districts as local units of state government, to plan and carry out conservation programs.

So that leaves about a four-year spread in which to celebrate a Golden Anniversary of Conservation.

Nationally, the SCS information staff got the ball rolling by listing 50 ways that state and district conservationists could set up their own observances.

Then the information staff:

- created six copies of a free-standing exhibit which have been booked every week this year for state and local events.

- with the help of the states, provided forums for Agriculture Secretary John R. Block to deliver the conservation message.

- provided speech material for Congressmen and U.S. Senators.

- created a raft of fact sheets.

- joined the University of Missouri in sponsoring a symposium on the history of soil and water conservation at Columbia, Missouri.

- designed a certificate of appreciation for state and local SCS offices to award persons outside SCS for conservation efforts.

- helped state and local personnel with the preparation of countless publications, slide shows, radio PSAs, tours and banquets.

- helped prepared gubernatorial proclamations to mark conservation weeks and months.

- worked with closely associated groups such as the National Association of Conservation Districts and the Soil Conservation Society of America, to foster the issuance of a commemorative stamp and the release of limited edition prints.

The best wildlife photos of SCS photographer Tim McCabe were exhibited at a special show at the National Wildlife Federation in Washington, D.C.

Since the theme of this year's National Wildlife Week was "Soil: We Can't Live Without It," a half million school children received packets of conservation material during the third week in March.

Meanwhile, out in Iowa, 400 sets of a television public service announcement featuring a well-known magician and "invisible soil erosion" are being prepared for national distribution.

The celebration went into high gear the week of April 22 in Washington. Information events included: the opening of a special exhibit in the patio of USDA's administration building in Washington; a panel discussion; the showing of a film; a "Run for Conservation" on the Mall; the showing of documentaries; a symposium; a reception, and finally, a big banquet on Capitol Hill.

All of this, notes Lee Shields, assistant director of information at SCS, was accomplished beyond the regular duties of the people involved.

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## VIRGINIA TECH INVITES REPORTERS AGAIN

Agricultural marketing will be the theme of this year's agriculture short course for reporters at Virginia Tech, July 11 and 12.

Virginia Tech Extension faculty successfully opened a series of annual short courses for reporters last year.

Because of the short courses, this year's announcement flyer explains, "it is hoped that reporters unfamiliar with agriculture or certain aspects of agriculture will feel more comfortable with the task of covering agricultural news."

How much agricultural background is expected of participants? Little or none.

This year's program can be examined with interest from several angles. For instance, some will notice that there will be barbeques both days at noon and both a reception and dinner the evening of opening day.

Closing event Friday July 12 is a press conference with Congressman E. (Kika) de la Garza, Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, beginning at 1:30 p.m.

Various agricultural researchers will be available to explain their progress during the opening day registration period.

For more information, contact Terry Canup, manager, Extension information office, Virginia Tech, at (703) 961-6247, or at 200 Media Building, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA 24061. Canup's ITT Dialcom electronic mailbox is AGS2418.

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## INFORMATION STAFFERS TAP FNS DATA BANK

You say you've got a warehouse (data bank) stuffed with facts about Federal food programs and all you want is a little of it to answer some reporter's query?

Extracting that little bit of information could be a time-consuming, manpower intensive job.

Regional public information directors in USDA's Food and Nutrition Service asked their management information division for help. Could they devise a system making it possible for the regional offices to tap the mother lode of program information through their newly-acquired minicomputer system?

What the information directors said they needed was quick access to State and national program participation and benefit levels, funding and other general program information to respond to questions from the media, for briefing and background papers for top USDA and FNS officials, and to answer inquiries from congressional offices and the general public.

The experts found the answer.

The first output consisted of only 10 lines of food stamp data, 5 lines of socioeconomic information, and 25 blank lines. But that broke the ice.

Other program data were added, and by the end of 1984, individual State and national profiles on all but the smallest FNS programs became available via microcomputer.

Phase II, with triple the number of data elements, is expected soon.

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INSIDE INFORMATION is published for distribution to public affairs and information staff members of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, its agencies, state departments of agriculture and land grant universities. Any items, comments and inquiries should be addressed to either John Crowley or Nancy Bevis, Office of Information, Room 536A, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250 or to AGR009 mailbox on the Dialcom system, or call (202) 447-7454.

